

TWO POETS of the PEASANTRY

I

And still the grass eternal springs
Where castles stood and grandeur died.
John Clare.

King Edward nods silver-haired and senile
in his Palace
of Sheen. That feeble head has almost
forgotten now
Crecy and Poitiers. So has France; where the
tide of war
turns slowly but resistlessly backwards to the
sea. So has
England; where city-alley and country-
tavern are full of
moody faces and muttering discontent. The
Prince who
fought in those far-off victories lies already,
with the slow
dust settling on his armour, in the Trinity
Chapel of
Canterbury; and beside the old King watch
now only
the harpy's eyes of Alice Perrers. She has
been chased
once from the Court, by the Good Parliament;
the wizard,
who helped her to bewitch the King,
dragged off to
prison; the Bishops pledged to excommunicate
her, should
she dare return. She has returned; but the
Bishops are
silent; and the acts of the Good Parliament
stand expunged
from the statute-book of England. Now
again she sits
watching for the day when she can grab the
last rings
from the failing hand that once held both
France and
Scotland in its grip, and be gone. A few
months more,
and her vigil will be over, and Europe learn:

Edward the King is dead; at Westminster
The carvers smooth the curls of his long
beard.

Meanwhile, the times grow worse. John of
Gaunt has
packed the Bad Parliament to replace the
Good; has seen
the last Speaker, Peter de la Mare, flung into
Nottingham
Castle and William of Wykeham, the late

Chancellor,
hunted with writs up and down his own
diocese, till none